

# Commentary

## PERSPECTIVE ON IMMIGRATION

# Why Damn a Great State Resource?

Mexican author **CARLOS FUENTES** visited San Diego and Tijuana this week to participate in a transborder arts festival. He spoke about the immigration issue with Times Staff Writer Sebastian Rotella.

**I**t happened to Jewish communities throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. Or the reaction that Hitler fanned in Germany after World War I: You must find a scapegoat for the problems you yourself have created and which you do not wish to face. It is a cowardly act. It is an inhumane act.

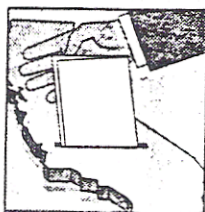
The deficit and unemployment in California are due to the end of the Cold War, the closure of defense industries, the advances in technology. Today, productivity breeds unemployment, and we have no solution for that. Plus 12 years of Reagan and Bush voodoo economics. That is what causes deficit and unemployment in California—not Mexican workers.

California produces one-third of the agricultural output of the United States; 90% of that produce is harvested by Mexican hands. Mexico imports \$1.2 billion a year from California, \$2 billion a year from Texas, \$4 billion a year from the Rust Belt. Thanks to Mexico's imports, the Rust Belt has gone from deficit to surplus in trade. And at the same time, the United States helps the economy of Mexico in many ways. We depend on each other.

But if we deform the issues, if we inflame the issues for purely electoral reasons, for demagogic reasons, there is going to be a lot of trouble. Mexico can retaliate. If Mexico declared a boycott of California goods, this state would lose more than \$1 billion. And if Mexican workers in California decided not to work for one day, for one week, things would come to a standstill.

I think we should be very cautious about these matters. Gov. [Pete] Wilson is poisoning the relationship between the United States and Mexico, which goes beyond November, beyond his demagogic electoral agenda.

And Proposition 187, "save our state," is aberrant in every sense. It is an illegal proposition because it goes against the landmark decision of the Supreme Court of 1982, which assures that children of immigrants would have education. Which means that Gov. Wilson is acting in a purely demagogic way, because he



**PROP. 187**  
Measure would deny public health, education and welfare benefits to illegal immigrants.

■ One in a series

surely knows that if the proposition is passed, it will clash with jurisprudence in this country and will be immediately enjoined by the courts. It is a socially unsound proposition because it forgets that immigrants come to this country not searching for welfare or education, but searching for jobs. And it is both humanly and politically aberrant be-



**EYEWITNESS:**

**CARLOS FUENTES**

**'The U.S.-Mexico border [will be] one of the great hubs of an interdependent culture for the 21st Century if we do not drown it in blood and intolerance.'**

cause it makes targets of schoolchildren and snoopers and witch-hunters of teachers and health workers. It is going to create a kind of McCarthyite police state of extreme danger.

It is a very serious matter, it is a very serious moment, and we should be looking for real political and social solutions based on the realities of the flux of the labor market, both bilateral and international.

It is a labor problem. It is not a police problem.

In general terms, the U.S. economy is so mobile, the labor market is so mobile, that if you displace workers from one place they will find jobs in another place. It is an economy in expansion that

permits an absorption of immigrants. If the economy in California is not mobile and is not growing and cannot absorb immigrants, then something is wrong with the economy of California. It has nothing to do with Mexican immigrants. It has to do with misrule. It has to do probably with the misrule of Mr. Pete Wilson, personally.

When he was a U.S. senator, Gov. Wilson pleaded for immigrants to harvest in California. Now he has changed his tune because he has found an issue that is inflammatory and that will probably make him win the election. I think it is a purely electoral ploy, but a very dangerous electoral ploy on the part of a demagogic politician.

Conflict is inevitable unless a kind of political education takes place very quickly in the minds of countries that have colonized and exploited and plundered the Third World for 500 years and are suddenly absolutely surprised that the Third World comes back to them. And even more surprised that this should happen in a world of instant communications; flow of capital, technological advances. [In such a world] it is inevitable that also there should be mobility of the labor market. It is happening, but nobody knows how to deal with it, or they do not want to deal with it. These same things are happening in Germany against Turks, France against Algerians and in Italy against black Africans.

The U.S.-Mexico border is going to be one of the great hubs of an interdependent culture, of a culture for the 21st Century, if we do not drown it in blood and intolerance. There is a potential for showing what the New World, what America as a continent, is capable of in its historical mission of fusion of cultures—of creating new cultures out of the existing cultures of the world. We are a continent of Indians and blacks and Europeans, and not only English or French or Spanish, but Mediterranean, Jewish, Arab, Greek, Roman. We have an extraordinary capacity for this blending, this amalgamation of cultures.

This border is the most exciting border in the world. It is crossed by 200 million people a year. There is no border like it. I have always said it is a scar, not a border. But we don't want the scar to bleed again. We want the scar to heal.